Whitelaw's Experience

By

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WHITELAW'S EXPERIENCE.

I.

James Whitelaw was alarmed. Not that he would have admitted it, however, to his oldest and best friend—hardly even to himself. But, like many another successful business man, he was a wee bit superstitious; and when after the worry and stress of the past six months he had unloaded the Midland and Marine Railway which for years he had quietly fought to control, and when on counting up he had found himself a million and a quarter to the good, he felt that it was about time for something disagreeable to turn up just to make things even.

For half a year the excitement of the big deal had made him a stranger in his own home. He had put off the pleadings of his wife, who with true motherly instinct had anxiously noted the hollowness of his eyes and the increasing gauntness of his face, with the assurance that when "this deal" was over they could take their first real vacation. But now—just now—he was occupied with the most important business stroke of his life and he could not "take care of himself."

If he looked fagged, small wonder when fat cigars took the place of meals and the social cocktail served the added purpose of whipping up the tired brain.

Well, it was over and he had won out. Together with the fortune which had been gradually accumulating during his entire career this final brilliant prize made the road clear for well earned rest and for the indulgence of hobby riding—that wonderful kind of hard work which is the truest recreation.

For the first time in half a year Whitelaw had dined at home and had promised his overjoyed wife

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the entire evening, "the first of many," he had announced, to celebrate as she desired. Tonight it was to be Farrar in "Butterfly."

In spite of the uneasy gnawing pain after food which had lately caused him to avoid the salads and heavier courses, this time he partook freely so that Mrs. Whitelaw's pleasure might not be marred by solicitude on account of his abstinence. But when Whitelaw went to his den for the tickets the pain and nausea became so distressing that relief was imperative—and afterward, on wiping his lips, a red stain upon his handkerchief had startled him.

Quietly he seated himself at his desk and tried to compose himself. It could not be anything serious! —and the pain had now quite vanished. Yet there was poor Willard who died last year of cancer of the stomach!

Gradually he lapsed into a deep reverie from which he was aroused ten minutes later by his wife who stood in the doorway.

"Oh! Dearest! What has happened? You look so blue! And I believe you have forgotten our engagement. If you think the opera will tire you we'll not go."

Instantly Whitelaw had control. "No indeed, sweetheart, I wouldn't miss it tonight of all nights. I was just woolgathering—a bad habit I've lately contracted. Is the car at the door?"

II.

Conversation three days later at the Consulting Rooms of George Bardwell, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Whitelaw: "Well, Doctor, what's the verdict?"

Dr. Bardwell: "Except for your twenty pounds loss in weight and the sallow tint of your skin I can find nothing outwardly wrong with you."

Whitelaw: "You mean that all I have to do is to fatten up a little and that my indigestion will disappear?"

Dr. Bardwell: "I did not say that. Even without any visible signs you have a history which strongly suggests some organic trouble. For years

you have been most irregular in your habits. You have been kept for days and weeks at a time in the state of nervous tension which causes the gastric glands to pour out acid and to lock in it the stomach. You have bolted your food in your jealousy of the working hours of the day. You have irritated with alcohol and tobacco the delicate lining of the mouth and the stomach."

Whitelaw: "Please, sir! I didn't mean it! You certainly make me feel like a sinner! Yet you say you can't find anything the matter with me. What is your advice?"

Dr. Bardwell: "The *x*-ray should help us. If that also proves negative I shall send you back again to our friend, Dr. Delaney, for medical treatment:"

Whitelaw: "But, Doctor! I have no broken or displaced bones, have I? Surely the *x*-rays can't show changes in the flesh."

Dr. Bardwell: "I see you've been so wrapped up in your business that the world has left you several laps behind! Certainly the Roentgen rays can do more than show broken bones and bullets. Sometimes they detect changes which can only be suspected with all the older diagnostic aids."

"Many of the hollow organs of the body are shown most accurately in outline and with the help of the stereoscope they stand out in three dimensions. The chest looks like a wonderful chamber of glass in which we can clearly discern the heart and the delicate tracing of the lungs. Even the skull becomes transparent."

Whitelaw: "You astonish me and I am most impatient to behold this true picture of my inner self! Will you not photograph me at once?"

Dr. Bardwell: "I will direct you to a laboratory where this work can be done. Roentgenology has become a great department of medical science with many specialties within it. To take the picture is the task of a mere technician. The study and interpretation of the finished plate and the actual inspection of the living, moving body with the fluoroscope are work for the skilled observer. There are those who

specialize in the radiology of the chest; others who devote themselves almost exclusively to the abdomen. Modern dentistry would be seriously handicapped without its radiography. And yet this great field of investigation is but in its infancy.

"Your own case will require a thorough preparation of your alimentary canal; then you will make your first visit to the laboratory—on an empty stomach. After taking what is known as the *x*-ray meal, an opaque milky liquid, there will be plate exposures and dark room examinations in a profusion which will appear to you most wasteful. Yet remember that the stomach is in constant motion so that its outline is ever changing. In the early days of radiography wrong diagnoses and unnecessary surgery were not unknown because we placed too much reliance on a single plate.

"Costly as it is, the present method is in truth efficient and economical if it can but avoid the suffering and expense of an operation with its weeks of after treatment.

"And even that radiograph which reveals nothing anatomically wrong may be quite as important as one which indicates disease. For example: indigestion with pain in the upper abdomen often means a lesion of the stomach; but these symptoms may also be caused by an appendix grumbling in the distance. The radiograph showing a normal gastric outline will then tell us that we must look elsewhere. Kast* has put the matter well when he said 'As soon as our eyes were opened to the conditions of the living organs in the abdomen, biology took the place of speculation and post mortem deductions.'

"But, my dear boy, I'm boring you with all this shop. I've only begun to skim the surface, yet I get so enthusiastic about it all that I don't know when to stop."

Whitelaw: "Indeed, no. On the contrary you have opened a fascinating new world to me. I am looking forward with genuine interest to my novel

*New York Medical Journal, December, 1915.

experience. Thank you for your sympathetic kindness and *au revoir.*"

III.

"Do you know, dear Jim," said Mrs. Whitelaw, "that it is just three years since you came home after your operation at the Samaritan? You've never been so well since I have known you and I am a perfectly happy woman."

James Whitelaw, a little grayer but ten years younger for all that, put down his evening paper and walked over to his wife's chair.

"Sweetheart," and his arm rested about her shoulders, "I am blest far beyond my deserts. In the early afternoon of life I have the most perfect friend and companion in the world. We have health and love. I have not forgotten three years ago and I mean to show my gratitude in the only way I can. I have just been informed of my election to the board of managers of the Samaritan Hospital and—"

"Oh! I'm so glad!" Mrs. Whitelaw delightedly interrupted. "You needed just that and you'll do such splendid things!"

"I shall certainly do my best and you must admit, I'm well fitted for the job. I have always preached starting at the bottom and no one could begin hospital work on a lower plane than that of a mere patient—'material,' I believe is what they are called by our scientific physicians."

"Don't you think, Jim, that you ought to make some special offering to mark your entrance into this new avocation?"

"I surely do," said Whitelaw, "and since I've always believed that next to the operation itself the radiograph was the means of saving me I intend to ask for the privilege of supporting the *x*-ray department during my lifetime and I want you to make the institution a noble gift when I am dead."

"Shame! Jim! to talk so gruesomely. Give it yourself—now—and live to enjoy the magnificent spectacle of its fruits."

IV.

Every year cancer of the stomach robs the world of thousands of mature men and women at the time of life when they should be most useful.

Cancer of the stomach can be eradicated by surgical removal and in *no other way*.

To act promptly an early diagnosis is imperative.

The disease is rare under the age of 25 but its mortality increases rapidly after 35. The number of deaths is greatest in the decade between 55 and 65. It is almost as frequent in women as it is in men.

Often the onset is insidious so that malignancy may be far advanced when the first warning comes.

To await the appearance of unmistakable physical signs of the malady means fatal postponement of the operation.

But beware of "carcinophobia," the *groundless* fear of cancer; like the case of the medical student who, on learning that cancer of the stomach may present no symptoms whatever, diagnosed the disease in himself because he felt perfectly well!

In a person more than 45 years old persistent dyspepsia with loss of weight should be noted with suspicion.

A change in appetite, such as a distaste for meat is not infrequently a symptom.

Pain at the pit of the stomach and vomiting, often without visible blood, are still graver danger signals.

The most careful investigation at the hands of a skilled physician is urgently necessary, and all the diagnostic methods of our day should be brought to bear.

Of these the *x*-ray is the most illuminating.

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